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# Females in Cultural Encryption: A Review of Eight Polish Discourses on Females with Disabilities

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## Abstract

*This review contains the analysis of contemporary Polish discourses on females with disabilities. Special attention has been directed towards the femininity of women with intellectual or physical disabilities, and discourses conducted by special educators, adult educators, psychologists, sociologists, cultural anthropologists, philologists, artists etc. co-operating in Poland, in the areas of special education, andragogy from 1989-2015. Furthermore, I analyzed the selected media discourses, taking place in the public space. Text starts with the definitions of femininity in Polish dominant culture.*

*Indicated discourses were introduced in the context of the ontological, epistemological and research paradigms behind the researches of femininity and disability. Discourses are arranged on the ground of socio-political and cultural transformation in Poland after 1989, this mean the end of communist regime. I submit therefore in outline and analyze 26 years of changes in the discourses about females with disabilities in Poland. Discourses were introduced in chronological order of appearance in Polish culture, indicating also the scientific interests of researchers. First appeared the medical-clinical discourse and then andragogy, biographical, cultural, religious, literary, art and media discourses as well.*

**Keywords:** Disability theory, academic discourse, public discourse, media discourse, disability, intellectual disability, females, Poland.

## Introduction

Contemporary discourses conducted in Poland about females with disabilities are pending on two plans: academic and public space, both real and the virtual. Females with disabilities are the subjects of discussions in two major cultural perspectives: the perspective created by the dominant culture and one created by the disability cultures, where participants are persons with disabilities and their circles of social networks. In the discourses, undertaken on femininity with disability in dominant culture of contemporary Poland, and in the academic spaces are involved scholars from different disciplines, co-working with special educators and adult educators. These include

clinical psychologists, sociologists, cultural anthropologists, linguists, artists and others. Participants in the public discourse on the personal level, are recruited from individual females with disabilities.

From the cultural perspective, participants of discourse are the professional or other voices of dominant culture on females with disabilities. In the first case, females with disabilities tend to be depicted as heroines in such public discourses. For example Polish sportswomen with disabilities are such or photo-models with disabilities as well. There are voices about their personal life, lived with successes, passions and difficulties. In the second case the reality and directions of discourses are created by any other person but with disabilities. Below I introduce the eight major Polish discourses on females with disabilities. The females are in various stages of their adulthood. They are in early adulthood (20-40), the average (40-60) and late adulthood (60-...). They are females with disabilities in various areas of physical, intellectual, sensory, mental or their combinations. Polish women with disabilities are present in the discourses of females with different life experiences associated with disabilities.

They may be women with disabilities from birth or those who lost their functional, intellectual, physical or other skills due to physical injuries, traffic accidents or chronic, degenerative diseases. Common elements in all generated discourses are changes in social and customs dimensions in Poland after the year 1989. Since then, appeared gradual change of roles of females with disabilities, and developed to their greater autonomy and social presence. Łaciak<sup>27</sup> has applied qualitative analysis to Polish media after 1989. She analyzed press releases, movies, soap operas and TV shows in Poland since the 1989-2005. On this background, the author developed the images of mores changes built in Poland after 1989, the end of communist regime. Among the topics that were generated from the data, the author analyzed changes in following dimensions: marriage and family of Poles, customs about the body and carnality and customs associated with cultural and religious holiday and traditions. The author also paid attention to the problems of diseases and suffering of females and males.

## Review of Literature

**Cultural codes of femininity:** Arcimowicz<sup>2</sup> believes that the category of femininity is often contrasted with the category of masculinity. In the academic literature there are many scientific definitions of femininity. Olechnicki and

Załęcki<sup>40</sup> define femininity as "socially defined and directed to females set of expectations, obligations and rights determined, that exist in a particular social group as pattern for females, seen as appropriate and desirable for individuals of that sex". Relativism of relationships between the characteristics of femininity and culture is noted by Arcimowicz<sup>2</sup> writing that "behaviors that in our culture we combine traditionally with masculinity, in other societies are combined with the femininity and vice versa - what in our society is a sign of femininity, in another part of the world can be combined with the role of man."

**Corporeality and attractiveness:** One of the aspects associated with femininity and attractiveness is carnality. Marszałek<sup>32</sup> believes that "in most societies often openly is considered the physical beauty of females than males. The women's physical sphere revolves around their appearance, about the value of their own value of the beauty and the way of responding". The author believes that a female defines her body. Concern for the beautification of the body is as old as humanity itself throughout the world. The author suggests that analyzing the lives of Europeans since the beginning of the twentieth century, related to the care of the body, aesthetics, providing adequate food. First, appeared in the social elites after 1945 to be popularized and at the end of the 20th century to become a model, but varied widely applicable and socially diverse. Łaciak<sup>27</sup> writes that in Poland after World War II in 1945, interest in own body was not very popular due to the ruling communist ideology and personality patterns propagated.

All times after regime change in Poland resulted in socially stronger emphasis on the issues of physicality and attractiveness. Dobrowicz<sup>7</sup> explains that while in the past the female was in a sense perceived as a prisoner of the home, today is seen as a prisoner of her body. The author believes that from early childhood contemporary female's sex is constructed by her appearance and the body becomes the basis for the construction of identity of Polish females. Pole, according to the sarcastic tone of the author, should be primarily beautiful, pleasing and her most important area of activity is to be seducing men. Polish females gradually changed since 1989 the perception of themselves as well as their own beauty, sex and femininity.

Korolczuk<sup>17</sup> since 2005 conducted in Poland researches, aimed at creating theoretical proposals related to the changes of females' identity after 1989. The sample consisted of 16 females, who represented two generations of mothers and daughters. All of the females had a high school education or higher level degrees and were in good economic standing. The author writes that "in general, in the generation of the daughters the first concrete associations with femininity usually related to the sphere of the body - physical attractiveness, beauty and care for each other. Meanwhile, the older participants, mothers were more likely to point issues such as: independence, self-fulfillment, passions and pursue their own needs. "The author also draws attention to

the paradox of being a female in today's times, revealed during the interviews with respondents.

On the one hand they answer that female should be sensitive, gentle, caring, to be an exemplary mother and wife and comfortable with performing these roles. At the same time should be entrepreneurial and assertive person in the field of public life. Nowadays, the author says, a huge impact on the image of females, including in the sphere of physicality, they have the public media. They provide descriptions and depictions of what at the moment is considered as feminine. And this in turn can affect the perception of a subjective herself as a female. Klimkiewicz<sup>15</sup> believes that "the image of female in advertising spots contributes to the frustration of many women. Some females cannot accept their own bodies when deviating from the "guidance" of advertising. Such Polish females take a number of steps to bring own bodies to the "ideal of womanhood." Author concludes that females who deviate from the media standards, often feel worse and unhappy.

**Traditional and emancipated femininity:** The past, that is the beginning of the twentieth century, basically the only role attributed to females, was in Poland the role of wife and mother. Female was the guardian of the home and shared responsibilities with man. Przybyło-Szlachta<sup>44</sup> wrote that "a woman's place in society, is marked by the physiology. The possibility of having children and the consequent need to care for them, attribute female to the domestic sphere, subordinate to the social sphere which was dominated by males". Years of the 60s in 20th century, according to Łaciak<sup>27</sup>, were characterized by the fact that in Poland it was not questioned woman's right to work. Female was not expected to the sole sacrifice for the offspring. In Poland were created nurseries and kindergartens. In the 80s bill was introduced in Poland for parental leave, lasting from birth of the child to his/her 3 years of age.

**Feminocracy in Poland:** Contemporary social status and rights of females in the western culture are identical with the position and rights of males. There are no also well-defined differences in the distribution of functions performed by Polish males and females in the family. What characterizes the role of contemporary females goes beyond taking care of the home, as a place of family life and raising children, although these threads are still important in the life of Polish females. Zbyrad<sup>59</sup> writes about the transformation of the role of females: "from a sociological perspective, this phenomena as female out of the house", had an even deeper meaning. Namely, it has included a variety of roles in life, which changed her social position". The author continues that modern times are characterized by a strong domination of females. The beginning of the 21st century could be called "feminocracy" time (the rule of females). It means females rule in the home, at work, in politics.

Markocki<sup>31</sup> indicates the multiplicity of roles of modern Poles. The author believes that they exercise a lot of roles and functions in the life of their families and society. They

are wives, fill parental responsibilities as maternity, perform professional work, and participate in social and political life. Więckiewicz<sup>51</sup> indicated modern Poles roles in the context 3 models of functioning. The first model includes females, who by their own choice are engaged exclusively in the household and the care for children. The second model are women who engage in the home, childcare, paid work, This model is currently performed by about 80% of all Polish females. The third model is associated with the Polish females only economically and work active. From contemporary Polish realities, females are expected to smooth the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities fulfillment. Author continues that these expectations, however, are associated with changes in the roles performed by Polish males and allocation of their responsibilities.

Więckiewicz<sup>51</sup> writes that both husbands and wives as partners co-decide about nearly everything together. And furthermore childcare is distributed equally well on both parents. Arcimowicz<sup>2</sup> writes that there are families in which the Polish female is a housewife with care for children and Polish female gainfully employed. In Poland, since 1989 there was constructed a new image of females as more independent and decisive about their lives. Contemporary females decide about their future education, gainful employment and lifestyle. Lonely females become singles and not culturally oppressed and called "old maids". Więckiewicz<sup>51</sup> writes that a female who decided not to marry, is a single. This term does not have a negative connotation, but today is seen as a personal choice, fashion and way of life.

In terms of researching Polish females in work, some researchers indicate discrimination, despite the prevailing gender equality. Matysiak-Grzeszczuk<sup>34</sup> on the situation of contemporary women in the labor market writes: "females in the labor market are faced with many forms of discrimination, which is already visible at the recruitment stage and after the moment of admission to work." The author continues that it is harder for females to occupy the higher ranks, because they have difficult access to leadership positions. The fact that females are not treated equally with men, is also associated with lower wages for their work.

**Polish female with disability:** Although, since 1989, has been a positive change regarding the contents of discourses on females with disabilities in Poland, there are still "white spots" and social acceptance of understatement, concealment or even protests towards key issues of life of females with a variety of disabilities. Many of these issues I would locate in the absence of adequate public awareness and relatively poor andragogy knowledge, concerning disability issues and females and their needs, despite their long-term presence in the public space. Contemporary discourses on Polish females with disabilities conducted in the academic world, scientific, literary, artistic as well as public discourses, conducted in the real world or the media, show analogic contents when consider females without

disabilities. Such examples would be the lines of thinking of carnality, attractiveness, social status, occupation, rights and social roles. Interesting to me discourses about females with disabilities were developed after the change of political system in Poland in 1989 and the end of communist regime. Therefore, it means 26 years of socio-political and cultural changes in Poland in times of political democracy.

A female with a disability, which is the subject of discourses, is a female involved in discourses. Moreover, discourses as I mentioned before, contain also own voices of females with disabilities. The key issues and the main themes of Polish dilemmas raised in 8 discourses are the issues of rehabilitation, health, employment and labor, attractiveness, carnality, intimate relationships, partnerships, marriage, sexuality, age and aging of females. I want to add that many of indicated topics are today discussed socially in details and still are dilemmas.

**Corporeal and social niche:** Wołowicz – Ruszkowska<sup>57</sup> on the fulfillment of social roles by females with disabilities writes, "the whole system of social norms and customary indicates how people should behave in a given age, regulates their real behavior, realizes they are confronted with their expectations. In the situation of disability people are often blocked. They need to change own plans of certain social roles for their significant reduction or modification." Author continues, "we can say that disability modifies the overall status of females, due to the difficulties performing the roles in family, professional, and others."

About the public perception of Poles with disabilities writes Marszałek<sup>32</sup> "in fact, because they are not perceived socially in terms of belonging to the sex, they had socially withdrawn their rights to pursue the female roles, allowing them only functioning within the identity of the person with a disability, which are associated with the most consecutive actions aimed to limit their rights and meet the blocking of their needs." This statement sounds bitter but is in my opinion true. This does not mean, however, according to the author, that disability completely prevents the performance of social roles of Polish females with disabilities and exclude them from public life.

**Body and beauty:** According to Marszałek<sup>32</sup> carnality and attractiveness of Polish females with disabilities affects the self-esteem. The way how females perceive their own attractiveness and femininity affects relationships which they build with other people, especially with males. Thus indirectly it relates to the fulfillment of domestic, feminine roles. Marszałek<sup>32</sup> writes that the female with dysfunction is aware of her sexual identity. The author continues that she "also learns by observation of social information about rules which result in the opportunity to take the role of wife and mother. At the same time she realizes that she is not in the core of social stereotypes and images that depicts a "real" female".

Marszałek<sup>32</sup> writes, "convinced about their own physical non-attractiveness, female by herself also limits her own aims and aspirations, for making and implementing roles appropriate to so called "regular" female." This, mean that quality of the female image has woman about, so it can determine kind of role she will serve in her life. Research conducted by Wołowicz-Ruszkowska<sup>57</sup> also moved the issue of body, carnality and the way Polish females perceive it. Below is an excerpt of expression made by one of the female participants in the research. Respondent writes: "females with disabilities are completely separate category." "The third sex means that for part of the males I am not seen as a woman." The term "third sex" appears in cited study in other voices of Polish females, participants of that research. This means, in a sense of females with disabilities, they felt discomfort because of their asexuality.

Not all females, however, have a negative attitude to their bodies and beauty. Following example would be the statement for this: "although my body is disabled, it is beautiful. No one turns away his sight." About her own body, experienced as making difficulties because of serious heart disease, also writes in her autobiography famous Polish poet Halina Poświatowska. Poświatowska<sup>43</sup> writes, "my body, which until now was only of interest to physicians, happened suddenly valid and useful. As I got the knowledge of the warmth of my body's shapes, sensitivity of skin, I admired and liked it more and more". Corporeality as discussed category of femininity with disability is extremely important, because it builds identity of the female, what indicate researchers.

Wołowicz-Ruszkowska<sup>57</sup> writes that "the determinant of femininity to be attractive and appealing to a men, most women consider important, because females identify themselves with their bodies". Therefore most females are identified with their bodies and physicality. Author continues that "the female exists in the community so far, as the body is able to make her visible." Chodkowska<sup>5</sup> considers, after the implementation of the study results about females with disabilities that the fulfillment of Polish women with disabilities in the marital roles, as the place for meeting their sexual and psychosocial needs does not disappear because of a phenomena of disability. Marszałek<sup>32</sup> insists therefore that "marriage is for females with disabilities as a valuable asset, as for healthy or able ones and that they will have an equally strong striving to take the role in marriage, in order to meet their needs. "

**Employment:** Another aspect of life is the professional life and work of Polish females with disabilities. It is a very important aspect of life, either carried out or remaining in a dream, of modern female with a disability. It is a source of independence and self-realization. The employment is of great value, not only for females without disabilities. Nowak<sup>37</sup> writes that "as for all persons with disabilities, including in cases of females with disabilities, professional work, is of great importance and its acquisition and retention

in employment is a kind of social therapy, one of the most important aspect of rehabilitation in social contexts". Moreover, paid work is a source of income, according to the author, and accelerates the integration into society as well as raises social status, helps break down stereotypes and prejudice." Currently there are in Poland gradually designed more employment places for persons with disabilities for both sexes. Despite this, it is true, that still females with disabilities in Poland, in various areas, face serious problems with employment. This applies especially to females with intellectual, moderate level of disabilities, who for entire life are placed in sheltered workshops. Very rare they are employed in inclusive places of employment in current Poland.

Available literature discusses also the problem of discrimination based on sex in hiring by employers of females with disabilities. The situation of females with disabilities in the Polish labor market is still worse than the situation of males with disabilities. Marszałek<sup>32</sup> writes "the achievement of economic independence associated with getting paid work and getting married, having own family, can be a considerable problem for Polish females with disabilities. The cause of these problems are grounded in the educational and occupational restrictions, architectural barriers and prejudices of employers. On the other hand, author continues: "the single fact of being a female with disability, is (in Poland) the primary cause of social discrimination."

The vocational life of Poles with disabilities in contemporary Poland, shows the slow evolution of the perception of the roles and professional life of Polish females. Depending on the type of health restrictions, functions and potential of females, the dominant culture in Poland generates following main topics discussed nowadays also in the academic environments. Except employment there are discussed: access to fulfilment in social roles of females with disabilities, such as marriage and maternity of females with disabilities and especially with intellectual disabilities.

In the public discourse on contemporary Poles, attention is also directed to access of professional and social space for females with disabilities. Polish media since 90s of 20th century offer variety of images of cultural icon as Female with Disability. Public attention is directed also to models, photo-models participating in sessions of fashion, more to Polish females athletes participating in Special Olympics worldwide. An important aspect is also public promotion of working women with amputations of limbs. Over the years, the political transformation in Poland since 1989, it seems that there have been many positive actions for the public image, rights for females with disabilities. Unfortunately, these actions are not sufficient or satisfactory for Poles with disabilities.

**Eight Polish discourses on Polish females with disabilities:** Analyzing the specialist literature, of

contemporary authors I have identified eight major discourses on femininity with disabilities held in Poland in the communist regime from 1945-1989 and after since 1989-2015 - democracy times 1989 and the change of the political system in Poland. I dedicate attention of academic and public discourses conducted in Poland after 1989 and analyze works of the Polish scholars, pursuing research in the field of disability in adults. First discourse about femininity and females with disabilities would be medical – clinical. The other as following are andragogy discourse, biographical, cultural, religious, literary, artistic and media discourses. Current issues and topics discussed in academia and public spaces, as I earlier mentioned, are located on the position and role of females with disabilities. There are discussed issues of work, employment, motherhood, marriage, partnership with males, position in local communities, sexuality and women with intellectual, physical disabilities rights.

Current researches are also conducted in the general areas as areas of professional life, family life, environmental, institutional and identity within them. Very rare are discussed issues of homosexuality of persons with disabilities, studied by Polish special educators, however such studies were conducted about gay men with intellectual disabilities by K. Nowak-Lipińska.

Over the past two decades, since the change in the Polish socio-political systems and to achieve independence from the then Soviet Union in 1989 - 2015, there have been many important Polish publications published on disability of adults of both sexes, emphasizing and negotiating new areas of adult life with disabilities. The concept of adulthood has become a symbol of a new social construction of adult disability representation. This concept has become a symbol and the keyword for the research and social activities, especially while study on people with intellectual disabilities. They were perceived by years back as a grown-up children, asexual people, or not able to reaching adulthood and maturity connected to adult roles. This social perceptions and biases of adults, but entire life immature about social roles, related to both sexes, existed both in academic environments and public space.

Changes in discourses were developed gradually and slowly after 90s of 20th century in Poland. After analyzing researches concerning the construction of femininity with disability in Poland, developed by academics and culturally grounded attributes of adulthood, I noticed the plane analysis of femininity with disability in Polish academia and also that females with disabilities are subject to a variety of culturally grounded discourses. The works cited below were published in the areas of Polish humanities and social sciences by specialist co-working in Polish special education and also adult education area.

**Medical-clinical discourse:** It is the oldest of the discourses about females with disabilities of various types, applied in academia before and after 1989 in Poland. Lot of attention

was drawn to this discourse by special educators, adult educators, medical sociologists and clinical psychologists. It was given in the long-standing tradition of positivist research in Polish social sciences concerning disabilities, after World War II and PRL (1945-1989), associated with and long-term dominance of empirical research and medical-clinical conceptualization of human disability in Poland. The discourse was (and currently is taken) over adulthood of persons with disabilities of both sexes, by researchers such as Kopeć<sup>16</sup>, Kowalik<sup>20-21</sup>, Kirenko<sup>14</sup>, Kaczmarek<sup>11</sup>, Piotrowski<sup>42</sup> and Majewicz<sup>28</sup>. The authors focused on the study of various aspects of rehabilitation and support to disabled adults of both sexes in various spheres. This contained social perception, the issues of the support in everyday life's problems. There were also present issues of adulthood but femininity as phenomena was coded in the research samples called females.

Such researches used specific rhetoric associated with separating and isolating issues of gender as femininity or masculinity in one common code: "individuals with disabilities". The participants in such researches or theoretical reviews could be youngsters, young adults, adults or even elderly but still had the same one constructed label "individuals with disabilities", or „handicapped individuals“, „disabled“. The issues of different sexes were deeply placed inside of one common group of people with disabilities. The facts that researches were conducted with participating females were expressed in the final theoretical publications or medical-clinical reports from the researches. The theoretical developments, are in this discourse based on the rhetorical construction of some asexual "unit" labelled "disabled". On the one hand, assumptions in medical-clinical discourse have reduced the dignity of the person with a disability to "units"; and deprived his/her physicality and carnality. This discourse is based on the medical model of disability which was very popular in Poland after 1945 and it is still present.

**Andragogy discourse:** Another contemporary Polish discourse that emerged in the mid-90s and in 2003 was fully developed as andragogy discourse, led by special educators, adult educators, psychologists, sociologists, about adults of both sexes with disabilities. The axis of the discourse is based on discussing the adulthood with disabilities and all issues related to intensively analyzed concept of adulthood of males and females with disabilities, intellectual disabilities and their attributes. Within this discourse are present two research paradigms and tradition of the researches, associated with positivist and constructivist paradigms. Indicted below authors are leading the researches on the wide landscape of conditions of daily life, work, sexuality, the quality of life of adults with disabilities or intellectual disabilities of both sexes. The main characteristic of andragogy discourse is based in my opinion, on the background of the social model of disability and main central construct called "adulthood with disability".

Scientific exploration or theoretical analysis within this discourse was led by Stochmiałek<sup>48</sup>, Kościelska<sup>18-19</sup>, Rzedzicka and Kobylańska<sup>45</sup>, Żółkowska<sup>60</sup>, Kijak<sup>12</sup>, Żuraw<sup>62</sup> and Janiszewska-Nieścioruk<sup>35-36</sup>. Nowak<sup>38</sup> in her research devotes attention to the problem of social exclusion of females with disabilities and risks of their social exclusion. Żuraw<sup>61</sup> refers to the challenges of females with physical disabilities in their life cycle. The author draws attention to the emergence of the phenomenon of private functional diagnosis (which took place in the family, the school, including peers, friends, partners) and the need to raise broad awareness of the need for "fortitude and body" of females, to hold such competencies that allow equal competition with non-disabled persons." According to the author, females who accept their disability and have acquired proper education do not need the external approval of their internal state of dysfunction and thus are able to live with their abilities satisfactorily.

Żuraw<sup>61</sup> points out that "it is important for them to find enclaves of social life - be it in a circle or other subcultures like giving a sense of competence, agency, security and sometimes even love." The last but important aspect is that females with disabilities are subject of the social pressure which affects the shape of their social relationships." Research into the motherhood of females with intellectual disabilities was conducted within the framework of andragogy discourse by Lizoń-Szłapowska<sup>26</sup> but the latest publication from the andragogy discourse is proposed in the book edited by educators Dworak and Leksy<sup>9</sup>. It deals with femininity with disability in the health and corporeality issues, besides there are present problems of perception of one's own bodies by females with mild intellectual disability. Andragogy discourse is based on core category as "adulthood with disability" with attention to femininity and females researches.

**Biographical discourse:** The third essential discourse in Polish scientific literature is called by me biographical and is grounded on biographical research on the life and such narratives led by special educators, adult educators, sociologists or adults with disabilities. Biographical discourse appeared in Poland in 1993, launched by a book by Chodkowska<sup>5</sup> "Female with a disability" and based on qualitative research. The author analyzes diaries of Polish females with disabilities. Chodkowska<sup>5</sup> has developed the issue of femininity in the context of disability in Poland. In this important publication researcher discusses the attitudes of childcare training, particular life problems of females with disabilities. The author indicated 4 attitudes to themselves and own disability of Polish females with physical disabilities. The first was the attitude of overcoming disability, based on the acceptance of performance despite the restrictions. The next was based on overcoming dysfunction as based on the realization of being labelled with the category as "disability". The third was the attitude of overcoming disability based on a sense of their own utility and the last was the attitude of resignation and was based on

low self-esteem.

Biographical discourse was gradually developed in circles of Polish academics, special educators and adult educators from about the mid-2000s and still has supporters among researchers dealing with issues of females with disabilities. In biographic discourse, the researchers are focused on obtaining biographical, narrative overview of the issues which construct and conceptualize femininity with disability. Researchers achieve decoding own images of femininity, also by understanding everyday life of Poles with disabilities and intellectual disabilities. Żyta<sup>63</sup> and Materna<sup>33</sup> are focused on the issues of relationships, families, maternity and parenting. Interesting biographical research on the problem of couples, marriage and sexuality of females and males with intellectual disabilities and marriages between females with intellectual disabilities and non-disabled males led by special educator Nowak-Lipinska<sup>39</sup>. Biographical research about marriages between persons with impaired hearing and without disabilities was led by Bartnikowska<sup>3</sup>. Interesting biographical studies on the relationship between men and women with intellectual disabilities and their identity were conducted by Lindyberg<sup>25</sup>. The author devotes a biographical attitude to study motherhood of mothers having children with disabilities. Research within the biographical discourse about sexuality, females and males with intellectual disabilities, was also conducted by Kościelska<sup>19</sup>. Żyta<sup>63</sup> examined the narratives of adulthood and a sense of feeling different by men and women with Down syndrome. The author explored their dreams and perceptions of adulthood in the families. Żyta<sup>64</sup> wrote also paper on parenting of adults with intellectual disabilities.

Interesting biographical studies were conducted by Kumaniecka-Wisniewska<sup>23-24</sup>. The author has interpreted approximately 20 in-depth interviews with females with intellectual disabilities, residents of stationary facilities in Poland. The author examined issues of the sheltered housing conceptualizations and self-perception by the females, research participants. In addition, the author identified the environmental impact and the way of life and stay on the course of biographies of females, and the process of shaping their identity as well. One of the most interesting conclusion was the fact that the females participants of stationary facilities even considered "mentally retarded," did not identify with this definition. Biographical discourse in my opinion is based on a combination of medical and social models of disability and constructivist paradigm of knowledge building and on biographical, qualitative researches.

**Cultural discourse:** Fourth important discourse in Polish pedagogical and anthropological literature and studies of females with disabilities is a cultural discourse. Discourse was shaped in two parallel disciplines in Polish special education, from about 2007 year and was also undertaken by Polish cultural anthropologists. As part of the discourse Polish researchers undertook ethnographic studies, critical-

emancipatory and hermeneutic researches. It is worth quoting that the cultural analysis of the determinants of attitudes towards disability were explored in 90s by special educator and sociologist: M. Chodkowska<sup>6</sup>. The other cultural studies as institutional ethnography of stationary facility for adults both sexes with intellectual disabilities, were undertaken in 1998-1999 by Wojciechowski, Borowska-Beszta<sup>55</sup>.

Critical-emancipatory and ethnographic studies were led by Krzemińska<sup>22</sup> about the love of females with intellectual disabilities. In addition, hermeneutic studies on contemporary discourses about intellectual disability, including feminine issues studied Woynarowska.<sup>56</sup> Besides, research in the context of the discourse on disability in general was led by Polish cultural anthropologists and philologists. Topoła<sup>49</sup> explored the content related to social attitudes towards the adults with disabilities and Malczewska<sup>29</sup> examined the areas of the insulation of adults with impaired hearing, taking into account both sexes. Special interest in cultural studies completed in domain of elderly females and disability undertook cultural anthropologist Perzanowski<sup>41</sup>. Author led analyzes based on narratives held by elderly Polish, rural residents in 1996-1999. The author has drawn up an interesting research report including the characters in the stories in, the villagers from the area of the southern Poland. The report concerned changelings both sexes, however, a considerable part of the report concerned the narrative about weird and "changeling females". The report included the narratives of elderly females living or already dead, of whom spoke rural communities as "dissenters" or "proteuses", "changelings". 4-year studies collected numerous materials and portrayed in the final report 12 women perceived as "changelings".

Perzanowski<sup>41</sup> described, among others, Sisters Stasia J. D., Marysia, K. Stasia, Marysia Kr., Hania, Tereska W., Paolcia-Pulincia B., Albina, Jania and Jadźka as "the other", "changelings", "proteuses". These females were in stages over the medium (40-60) and late adulthood (60- ~). The elderly females have been described from the perspective of their bizarre lifestyle, strange and weird appearance and such behavior. It turned out that they were disabled in different spheres and in the past under the law they experienced traumatic life events. Some events were associated with the taking away from them own babies and placing born children in Polish orphanages. The Polish females described in cited report lived in rural communities with "changeling", or "proteus" labels having sometimes very dramatic situations in life behind.

The study of females with developmental disabilities in the context of cultural discourse pursued Borowska-Beszta<sup>4</sup> in the years 2007-2009. The author explored the lifestyle of 50 males and females with developmental disabilities in Toruń. Participation in cultural discourse about females with disabilities has also led Trela<sup>50</sup> analyzing the issues of sexuality, image, physicality and cultural acceptance of

females with disabilities. In conclusion, in my opinion, the cultural model is associated with the cultural model of disability and such construct of femininity. It is also connected with constructivist paradigm and qualitative researches.

**Religious discourse:** Religious discourse on females with disabilities, I distinguish as the fifth in Polish academic environments, both special education and theological and also in Polish public space. This discourse is related to the model of disability, understood as a personal tragedy and identified as suffering. It is present in Poland since 1989 after the political transformation but since the beginning was devoted to the general problems of adulthood with disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities. This discourse is associated with conceptualizing disability of females and males through the lens of Catholic Social Science. Research in this area was undertaken by artist and special educator Wojciechowski<sup>53-54</sup>. Author directed attention to sexual abstinence of adults with intellectual disabilities, problems of growing up to adulthood and adult roles of females and males with intellectual disabilities and preparedness for marriage or parenthood.

Religious discourse is clearly focused on promoting abstinence in matters of initiating (before legal marriage) the sexual life of females and males with intellectual disabilities. Such discourse is widely supported by academics working from Catholic perspective on problems of femininity and females roles, perceived as traditional. It is also present on the set of practices in Catholic circles of support centers for adult both sexes with intellectual disabilities. In my opinion, religious discourse is an attempt to achieve social compromise and give solution in the discussion concerned with sexuality of persons with intellectual disabilities. Discourse is also based on the desire to solve the problems of implementing sexuality issues with the attention drawn to dignity of persons with disability and their sexual abstinence by focusing much theoretical and discussed issues on daily support for the development of such features as maturity in social roles, strengthening higher needs as love, intimacy or friendship.

**Literary discourse:** Another distinguished is sixth discourse, which is present in the academic literature (written by special educators and philologists) and in the Polish public space or public media. It is associated with clear concepts and ideas when it comes to sexuality research and scientific studies devoted to disabilities or femininity with disabilities. Discourse is undertaken both by scholars and females with disabilities, publishing own narratives as autobiographies, diaries or blogs. This discourse illustrates females in the prospects of otherness, loneliness, worseness, external stigma, using the metaphors or sometimes culturally created labels as categories of „worseness“ or „madness“. So are seen females with various disabilities in publication edited by Adamowicz, Anisimovets and Taranek<sup>1</sup> in book tit. "Worse woman". This book is an attempt to analyze in the



literary ways, stigmatized females with mental disorders.

Special educator and philologist Wlazło<sup>52</sup> wrote about the image of females with disabilities in literature. The Author notes that the image of a woman is focused on the description of general human functioning in the world, with particular emphasis on the situation of different types and degrees of implemented restrictions in independent living needs. According to the author, the image "may extend from a meticulous analysis of the biological basis of human existence to the grounds revealing universal philosophical considerations and diverse artistic creations".

Among the most important autobiographical and literary voices of Polish females with disabilities are: Poświatowska<sup>43</sup>, poet with serious chronic heart disease or Dul<sup>8</sup>, female with quadriplegic cerebral palsy. I think that literary discourse about females with disabilities is associated with a media discourse, indicated by a particularly personal voice of writers, poets with disabilities who post their narratives, poems in the virtual space, on their own blogs or social networking sites such as Facebook. Literary discourse is in my opinion related to the cultural model of disability and based on constructivist paradigm and qualitative researches.

**Art discourse:** Art discourse is dedicated to the artistic concepts and dimensions of the presentation and analysis of femininity with disabilities. It is based on the cultural model of disability. The discourse of art, is undertaken by Polish artists, art historians and others. Sometimes is associated with the construction of art exhibitions devoted to ideas of femininity and females having health problems, illnesses as: cancer, mental illnesses, disabilities or senility. Such phenomena are described in academic papers. Interesting exhibition of sculptures on corporeality, femininity and cancer was implemented in the 60s of the 20th century and later by Polish sculptor Alina Szapocznikow, suffering from cancer. Art exhibitions with depictions of illnesses associated with cancer in females were offered by female artist Markiewicz<sup>30</sup>. A series of works titled "Cancers" is knitted and arranged as colorful, soft sculptures of tangled forms. The artist used old females' clothes, and filled them by shredder, paperwork, documents, magazines for females and advertising brochures. The artist interprets that this ballast can form tumors in females.

Markiewicz<sup>30</sup> is not an outsider in a dialogue with the audience, but sensitive insider. The second dimension of art discourse on disability is grounded on analysis of art works from the perspective of femininity and disability. Sometimes such researches combine femininity and disability with senility and studies on aging in females. An interesting analysis of elderly females in art works led Sprutta<sup>47</sup>, describing and analyzing the selected works of art. The author discussed the phenomenon of aging females as repulsive or caricatured and idealized in confrontation with the brutal truth about aging process. The author referred to

the works of artists' painters such as T. Gericault and image of the old female tit. "Hyena Salpetriere", "Old woman", "Time and Crone" and "Bewitched".

Old age was sometimes, as the author noticed, a phenomena where artists attempted to romanticize and idealize the elderly females' depictions, especially in ancient sculpture, however with the opposite effect. The discourse of art is combined with media discourse and sometimes is significantly enriched in Poland virtual space by activity of females, participants of disability cultures, creating their own works of art, handicrafts and photos and publish such creative pieces of works in the social media as Facebook.

**Media discourse:** The last discourse I distinguished - eighth on females with disabilities, appeared in the Polish media: press, television, soap operas symptomatically in the 90s, showing as characters adults with disabilities of both sexes. However, in 1990-1991, after transformation changes in Poland which started in 1989, the Polish national women's magazines as "Your Style" published only two articles about disability in adults. I would add - after many years of absence issues of adults with disabilities in the Polish public space and social silence about it. After ten years, that is, in 2001, there was lot of publications concerning both males and females with disabilities in opinion of Łaciak<sup>27</sup>. According to the author the press ministered to males and females with disabilities with the euphemism "able differently" and presented adults with disabilities as heroes and heroines, who acquired successes, who were educated, successful in sports, artistic areas.

In one of the press paper texts, female student says, "wheelchair does not bother me to be happy". At this time were also developed blogs and photo-blogs and personal self-narrative activity in Polish social networks, undertaken by females with disabilities. This personal point of view enriched media discourse. Such activities are more implemented in the public space, thanks to such media as newspapers, television and the internet. Media discourse has, in my opinion two dimensions as personal and cultural. Personal discourse of females with disabilities includes the creation of self-narratives of various kind as photographic, poetic, shared on private blogs or social networking profiles for example: Facebook, Myspace, fotomody.pl etc. Maria, a young female with Down syndrome leads on a Facebook personal blog devoted to poetry. Her blog was called "Miss Mary of Poems". Interesting personal touch in her personal photo-narrative space gives Dominika Budzyńska. The author conducts a Facebook photo-blog entitled: "Make-up and Photography". Dominika Budzyńska is elegant female, neat with the highlighted femininity, open and satisfied with her net of friends and fiancé. She is makeup artist with physical disability. Dominika is present in the virtual space and Polish social media.



Photo by Patryk Dąbrowski

**Fig. 1: Dominika Budzyńska - on the beach**

There are many other females with different disabilities active in Polish virtual space. Photo-blog also leads another Polish female Sylwia Gajewska, glamour model with the physical disability called arthrogryposis. In addition to the personal dimension of media discourse led in virtual space, since the early 90's is present institutional discourse associated with femininity and disability. It presents the content and information about females sport heroines and sportswomen with disabilities who are successful at the Paralympic Olympics world. Among them are, Natalia Partyka – a successful a table tennis player with the amputation of the forearm, Katarzyna Piekut, javelin medalist and Marta Makowska, fencer in a wheelchair.

## Discussion

Femininity with a disability is emerging from the midst of the traditional roles of women towards emancipated self-conscious females. The process is slow and takes place in a differentiated manner if considering various disabilities in females. As most submissive socially group of women with disabilities are seen females with intellectual disabilities. They are assigned to the niches of contemporary domestic life, adult day care centers or stationary facilities. They also conduct independent adult life, having mild intellectual disability. They begin adult life after high school. They get married, bear children. Sometimes, however females with

disabilities are not brought up in the direction of accept or develop own femininity and fulfill the roles of any adult Pole. Sometimes mothers keep silent about the femininity of own daughters or their relationships with males. Sometimes they convey fears.

Wołowicz-Ruszkowska<sup>57</sup> writes, "the views of parents on femininity of daughters are influenced by the attitude of questioning their femininity. Young females emphasized that the mother did not awaken in them the awareness of femininity. Besides mothers sent fear before period of adulthood and entering into relationships with men". Confirmation of this issue in cited author is in the fragment of the statement of one of the female participant of the qualitative research: "I can say that as a child with a disability, I was not raised to the role of female." The author continues, "it seems to me that in such a deeper transmission that was given to me by my mother and siblings, it was not anything like that in the future I grow up to be a female and I will be realized as a woman, in these roles that are assigned for females". I find confirmation of this issue in my own researches published in 2013 and in the research conducted by Marszałek<sup>32</sup>. Marszałek<sup>32</sup> writes that "the responses clearly indicate that socialization processes, have the impact on the beliefs of females with disabilities. They tend to understand their roles perceived for them by their mothers. Internalization standards of femininity, transmitted in childhood and adolescence results in adulthood of females in not accepting or fear of taking role of adult female or mother." The author continues that "the research shows that people's perception of females with intellectual disabilities in Poland is heavily restricted and often refers to a consent to joint living in the same apartment of couples with intellectual disabilities. Contemporary attitude of Poles towards sexuality, marriage and procreation and child care by females and males with intellectual disabilities was studied by Izdebski<sup>10</sup>. The author completed the study in 2004, with the random sample of the 1004 Poles, over 15 years of age. The aim of quantitative study was to characterize the attitudes of Poles towards the sexuality of males and females with intellectual disabilities. Among the topics examined were: co-habiting couples, issues of marriage, sex, health, care for children, parenthood.

The results illustrated the cultural image of the limited tolerance for adulthood of females and males with intellectual disabilities. 25% of respondents supported the marriage of adults with intellectual disabilities and 26% did not express approval. 23% felt inappropriate sexual intercourse of people with intellectual disabilities. 50% did not express acceptance in terms of being guardians for children by females and males with intellectual disabilities. Almost every second person (48%) declared that having own child by a person with intellectual disability is inappropriate.

## Conclusion

Polish scientific and media discourses on females with disabilities, especially intellectual were introduced in 90s of

20th century and then were developed since 2000 until today. Eight Polish discourses I have distinguished in outline, show females with disabilities in the context of slow social changes towards public education about the needs of females with a variety of disabilities. In personal discourses which exist in Poland, females with disabilities are still negotiating their place in the dominant culture for acceptance of their carnality, dignity and own personal fulfillment in life. Transformations of Polish society and dominant culture are related to the slow acceptance of femininity with disabilities and their broader roles. However, a lot of time it will take designing a new cultural patterns through knowledge transmission and public education to change old grounded biases about the needs of Poles with disabilities and about any opportunities offered to them as females with abilities not only disabilities.

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